

## FOR OLDER ADULTS

As an older adult, you probably have many of the same reactions and feelings already mentioned. However, some feelings and reactions can be different or intensified. It's important to ask for support when you need it.

### Common Feelings

- Current losses can trigger memories or feelings associated with prior losses.
- Fear of dependency or lack of self sufficiency.
- Worry about limited financial resources and time to rebuild.
- Fear of loss of independence.
- Fear of a decline in health and limitations on mobility and ability to rebuild.

### Common Reactions

- Concealing the full extent of the disaster's impact.
- Apathy – no longer caring to rebuild or start over.
- Confusion or disorientation
- Not making use of available resources.



*Project Recovery is a service made possible through partnerships between Lutheran Social Services of WI & Upper MI Inc., The WI Dept. of Health Services, the Wisconsin Farm Center, the Federal Center for Mental Health Services and FEMA,*

## Anticipated Challenges

The weeks and months ahead will undoubtedly present some new and unexpected challenges related to the disaster. Although you cannot predict all you will face, it is helpful to anticipate a few likely circumstances. Below are some considerations.

**Moving back home** – Moving back into the family home once it is repaired can bring mixed emotions: relief and joy as well as feelings of sadness and fear. These are all normal feelings and reactions. Sadness is often due to the reminders of things that were lost or destroyed. Fear and anxiety are common upon returning to the location that was damaged by the disaster.

**Seasonal events** – During the first year following a disaster, many calendar events such as birthdays, holidays and the change of seasons can cause reactions, sadness and distress. It is normal for certain events to remind you of “how things used to be,” and of the things that were changed or lost. Recovery and healing involve letting yourself grieve for the loss of these things.

**Your health** – As you endure long-term stress, your health can be adversely affected. It is common for headaches, stomach or intestinal problems, colds, viruses, and an increase in allergies to occur more frequently. In addition, pre-existing medical conditions such as heart problems and high blood pressure may be exacerbated by the prolonged stress.

**Final note** – If stress, anxiety, depression, or physical problems increase, persist, or interfere with your regular activities, you should consult a physician or mental health professional, or call the toll free number provided below.

**1-866-422-3742 (Toll Free)**

**www.lsswis.org**  
**(key in Project Recovery)**

# Project Recovery

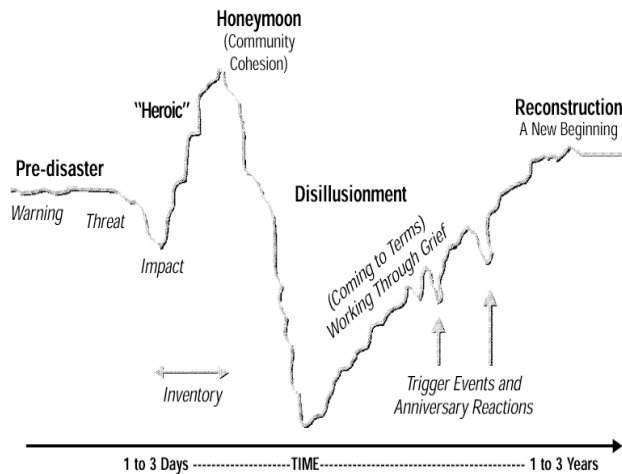
## Suggestions for coping with the emotional aftermath of a disaster



***Disasters often strike with little or no warning. In an instant your home and community can be damaged or destroyed and forever changed. Even if your home or business does not suffer directly, you can still feel a disaster's impact***

Adapted from information from FEMA & CMHS

# TYPICAL PHASES OF DISASTER RECOVERY



Source: Zunin/Meyers

## WHY DO I FEEL THE WAY I DO?

The loss or damage to your home, property and personal belongings has set into motion weeks and even months of effort to recover and rebuild. While physical property and possessions are initial concerns that consume your time and energy, emotional reactions to disaster are often pushed aside or ignored.

It is extremely important to remember that they are **NORMAL REACTIONS TO AN ABNORMAL EVENT**. You have been through an exceptionally stressful situation and these emotional reactions may continue for many months following the disaster. It is common for people to experience a wide range of emotional reactions to a disaster. These reactions are experienced in behaviors, feelings and thoughts, and may be upsetting to you and those around you.

## Your behaviors

- Problems getting to sleep or staying asleep.
- Isolating yourself or withdrawing from others.
- Keeping excessively busy and preoccupied to avoid the unpleasant effects of the disaster.
- Avoiding activities, places, or even people that remind you of the disaster.
- Increased anger, conflicts or tension with family members or other people.
- Crying or becoming tearful for no apparent reason.
- An increase or decrease in normal appetite.

## Your feelings

- Feeling just “not myself” or out of balance.
- Feeling a loss of interest in everyday activities.
- Feeling a sense of despair, hopelessness, or emptiness about the future.
- Experiencing anxiety or fear, especially when things remind you of the disaster.
- Feeling irritable, short-tempered, angry or resentful.

## Your thoughts

- Trouble concentrating or remembering things.
- Difficulty making decisions.
- Frequently replaying the events and circumstances of the disaster in your mind.
- Recurring dreams or nightmares about the disaster.
- Questioning of spiritual or religious beliefs.

## WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

There are many concerns, adjustments and ordeals that follow a disaster experience. Generally, within a short time there is the reality of financial setbacks and the loss of property and personal possessions. The endless adjustments that you and your family may have to make will put additional stress on your relationships and daily living. You may also grow physically and mentally weary from the task of cleaning up and rebuilding. All of these factors can potentially strain your ability to move forward.

In the aftermath of a disaster, it is important to **remember that it will take time to heal and recover** from the emotional effects of the disaster. However, with the passing of time, your efforts to cope will begin to reduce the intensity and duration of these emotional reactions and behaviors.

## HOW TO COPE AND WHAT WORKS...

### FOR YOURSELF

- Talk to others about how you are feeling. It is important to talk about your experiences; you need to express sadness, grief, anger and fears over what has happened and what you face.
- Don't overwork yourself. Take time off from repairs and be with your family. Take time for recreation, relaxation, or a favorite hobby.
- Do not let yourself become isolated. Seek out and maintain connections with your community – friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, or church members. Talk about your experiences with them.
- Pay close attention to your physical health as prolonged stress takes its toll on the body. Maintain a good diet and make sure you are getting enough sleep. It is also helpful to be physically active or to exercise.
- Upsetting times can cause some people to use alcohol or drugs to help cope with the stress. It does not help in the long run and will likely cause other problems.

### FOR YOUR FAMILY

- Families should keep some routines in place such as regular meals, certain enjoyable activities, and other family rituals. This will help you feel as though life has some normalcy.
- Couples need to attend to their relationship as this is often overlooked. Take time to be alone with one another, to talk about how you are feeling, and to have fun together.
- Take time to talk with children about their experience; listen to what they have to say and let them freely express their feelings. This is a confusing and frightening time for them. Remember that children do not have the same level of coping or understanding that you have.